DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 445 337 CS 217 241

AUTHOR Carroll, Pamela S.; Rosenblum, L. Penny
TITLE Characters with Visual Impairment: Looking at Books for Young Adults through Their Eyes.
PUB DATE 2000-08-03
NOTE 28p.; Paper presented at the International Conference for Global Conversations on Language and Literacy (4th, Utrecht, The Netherlands, August 1-5, 2000).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052) -- Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescent Development; *Adolescent Literature; *Characterization; Content Analysis; *Evaluation Criteria; High Schools; Literary Criticism; Middle Schools; *Reading Material Selection; *Visual Impairments
IDENTIFIERS *Response to Literature

ABSTRACT

A study that joined the fields of young adult literature and vision impairment explored the questions: How are characters who have visual impairment presented by young adult books?; and How do readers respond to those characters? Only a few books were found (13) that feature characters with visual impairments, and the portrayal of characters varies considerably. A.B. Heim (1994) established five criteria on which to evaluate books that depict mentally disabled characters, and these criteria are relevant for evaluating characters with visual impairments. Most of the books present characters who are adventitiously blind and whose blindness is finally cured, a situation which does not usually occur in real life. Teachers can use the following question checklist when evaluating a young adult book in which a character with a visual impairment is portrayed: (1) Does the book have characters who are congenitally visually impaired, both characters with low vision and characters who are blind?; (2) Does the book have a character with low vision?; (3) Does the book have characters who attend public school and have contemporary teenage experiences?; (4) Does the book have characters who are facing issues specific to teenagers with visual impairment in the 21st century?; (5) Does the resolution involve a cure for the visual impairment?; (6) Do the families and peers of the character with visual impairment act realistically toward that character?; and (7) Do the families and teachers expect the visually impaired character to be a successful independent person? (Contains a table, a 13-item annotated bibliography, and 9 references.) (NKA)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 445 337

Characters with Visual Impairment:

Looking at Books for Young Adults Through Their Eyes

Pamela S. Carroll

English Education, Florida State University

and

L. Penny Rosenblum

Special Education, University of Arizona

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

P S Carroll

CS 217 241

Characters with Visual Impairment:

Looking at Books for Young Adults Through Their Eyes

Pamela S. Carroll and L. Penny Rosenblum

Note: We have a common concern beyond our interests, from our perspectives as a young adult literature specialist and a vision impairment specialist, in adolescents' physical, psychosocial, and intellectual development. That interest is best defined in a pair of questions: How are characters who have visual impairment presented in young adult books? How do readers respond to those characters? These questions have led us to engage in research that joins the fields of young adult literature and vision impairment. The following is one result of our collaboration.

---PSC and LPR

Adolescence is a time filled with questions. "Who am I?" "Should I do what my friends are doing?" and "Will someone love me?" are questions most adolescents ask themselves. Young adult literature gives adolescents opportunities to share in the lives of others who ask the same questions they ask, and have the same types of experiences and concerns they have.

Adolescents with visual impairments have additional questions about themselves, such as, "Why am I the only one not getting a driver's license?" or "How do I know if a boy is flirting with me if I can't see him?" For these adolescents, unfortunately, young adult literature provides few visually impaired characters with whom they can identify. In the paragraphs that follow, we define a range of visual impairments that affect some adolescents, and examine the currently available young adult literature with characters who have visual impairments. We also provide

teachers with a list of questions and criteria for evaluating and selecting young adult books that feature characters with visual impairments. The article ends with our annotated bibliography of a selected young adult books that include characters who have visual impairments.

Characteristics of Adolescents with Visual Impairments

Visual impairment is considered to be a low incidence disability with approximately one in a thousand school age children being classified as visually impaired (Corn & Koenig, 1996). The term "visual impairment" is an umbrella term to delineate people on a continuum from totally blind to partially sighted. A person who is totally blind relies on tactual and auditory methods to gain information about his world. Approximately 10% of people with visual impairment are totally blind (Kahn & Moorhead, 1973 as cited in Corn & Koenig, 1996). Many people who are Braille readers may have some vision; for example, they are able to see light or large objects. These individuals are considered to be "functionally blind"; that is, even though they have some vision they rely on tactual and auditory means for learning. Individuals who are able to use their vision for learning, for example to read print, have low vision and are considered "partially sighted". There is great variation among people with low vision; some can read standard print such as what you are reading now; others can read standard print with the use of optical aids, such as a hand-held magnifying glass, and others rely on large print materials. We often hear the term "legal blindness," yet it is one of the most confusing "labels" in the field of special education. The term "legal blindness" is used when a person has a visual acuity of 20/200 or a visual field of 20 degrees or less in the better eye with best possible correction (for example, glasses, contact lenses). The term "visual acuity" refers to the amount of clarity one can see an object at a specified distance (e.g., 20 feet). A person with visual acuity of 20/200 can see an object (e.g., the large "E" on the standard Snellen eye chart) at 20 feet with the same amount of

clarity as a fully sighted person can see the same object at 200 feet (Corn & Koenig, 1996). The term "legal blindness" was invented in the early 1930s by the federal government as a means to determine who was eligible for government services because of restricted visual abilities (Corn & Koenig, 1996). Thus many individuals who are legally blind are also considered to have low vision; that is, they can read print and use their vision in conjunction with their other senses to learn.

Another distinction that applies to those with vision impairments has to do with the age at which the impairment is acquired. "Congenital visual impairment" indicates an impairment present at birth or almost immediately after birth. "Adventitious visual impairment" indicates an impairment that develops some time after birth (Corn & Koenig, 1996). A key difference between children and adolescents with congenital and adventitious impairments is that the latter have had some opportunities to learn about their worlds through visual means. For example, a young sighted child develops an awareness of symbols before he learns letters; a sighted three-year-old associates the golden arches of McDonald's with his favorite food, French fries. A three-year old with low vision or blindness would not learn to associate the visual symbol, golden arches, with food. A sighted adolescent is able to interpret nonverbal social behaviors such as the winks and grins that indicate flirting, but her friend, who has low or no vision, will not be able to interpret those nonverbal messages. For children with adventitious vision loss, the age at which they lost some or all of their vision will affect how they understand their world. The older they are when the vision loss occurs, the more they will be able to use visual memory and recall visual concepts (e.g., color) and use this information even though they are no longer able to "see" in the same way.

At times, teachers, families, and peers may not recognize that adolescents with visual impairments are missing information, and thus may not be interpreting the world in the same way as those who are sighted. For example, when a teacher discusses the bleak landscape of Poe's "Fall of the House of Usher," she is likely to use graphic illustrations to help students understand the impact of setting on the tone of the story. Students who do not see the illustrations may be less able to construct an understanding of the relationship between setting and tone than those who do see the illustrations.

Adolescents with visual impairments receive their education in a variety of settings, including the general education classroom, the resource room, the self-contained classroom, and, in rare instances, residential schools for students with visual impairments. For many adolescents with visual impairments in the general education classroom, there is little opportunity to meet others who, like themselves, have difficulty seeing. Thus it is not uncommon to find an adolescent with a visual impairment who finds she has no one in her life who really understands the challenges she experiences; like all teens, she will need family, friends, teachers and other adults who listen carefully and try to understand her. Adolescents with visual impairments may experience feelings of isolation and lack age appropriate role models with whom they can identify (Hutto & Hare, 1997; Peanstiehl, 1983; Sacks, 1996).

Knowledge of whether a child or adolescent has a congenital or adventitious visual impairment is somewhat helpful to teachers, families, and peers. However, what is imperative is a recognition of how an adolescent uses her vision to do everyday tasks. "Functional vision" refers to how the individual is using what vision she has in order to access her world (Corn & Koenig, 1996). Teachers of children and adolescents with visual impairments are specifically trained in methods to assist students in maximizing their visual abilities. For example, they may

teach students how to use specialized technology such as computers with a voice synthesizer, or they may help a student learn how to explain his visual impairment to others. In addition, these teachers also provide students who are functionally blind with Braille and auditory materials, and specialized instruction in how to use these to access information that is available to others through sight.

Young Adult Literature and Adolescents with Visual Impairments

We were unable to find any recent empirical studies that examine the reading of young adult literature by students with visual impairments. We were also unable to locate studies that give specific emphasis to the portrayal of characters in YAL who have visual impairments. This lack most likely stems, in large part, from the miniscule number of recent young adult books available in which there is a main character with a visual impairment. Some scholarly attention has been given, however, to young adult literature that portrays individuals with other disabling conditions such as physical disabilities and mental retardation. In these books, the portrayal of characters with disabilities, and those with whom they interact, varies considerably across a continuum, from unrealistic to realistic. This range is apparent also in the few books that feature characters with visual impairments.

Cathy's accommodation to blindness occurs with astonishing ease in Light a Single Candle. After jumping from the porch swing when her brother calls her, she realizes that:

> "Since Dr. Kruger took off the bandages for her and freed her from the sensation of being hopelessly blindfolded, she had caught herself more than once forgetting that because her eyes were open and her mind producing a steady flow of pictures just behind them to match what she touched and smelled and heard didn't mean she was actually seeing. (Butler, 1970, 42)

In contrast, Sally's struggle with her emotions, as well as with her disability, in the autobiographical Taking Hold: My Journey into Blindness, realistically indicates the slow and sometimes painful process of learning to accept vision loss, and to rely on other senses, people, and a dog guide. During her first walk outdoors with a cane, she was as required to wear glasses that occluded all light. Sally was frustrated and disoriented:

> I lumbered on, communing with my feet, tuning in to my cane, turning up my ears. Despite these efforts, I took another wrong veer. I went this way, then that, meandering like a river, although without direction. I knocked into grimy cars and hurried around them, sure that a moving car would soon flatten me. I strained for the sounds of oncoming traffic and felt for the sidewalk. (Alexander, 1994, 111)

When taking courses at a school for adults with visual impairments, Sally becomes aware of the importance of non-verbal communication, something that she had previously taken for granted:

> 'Facial expressions, hand gestures---these are a big part of communicating. Without sight, you may stop using them.'…'Sighted people will sense a difference when there's no facial expression,' Mr. Piaciafoco went on. 'They won't know what it is but they may conclude that they have nothing in common with you.' (Alexander, 1994, 119)

Although Light a Single Candle presents a more encouraging and comforting view of a person who acquires a visual impairment than does Taking Hold: My Journey into Blindness, it is the latter book, an autobiography, which is more realistic. Taking Hold: My Journey into Blindness is therefore probably more useful, not only to the reader who has a visual impairment, but also to the teachers, friends, and family that hope to better understand the way the world appears to someone who has a visual impairment. Nevertheless, the positive aspects of Light a Single Candle may be appropriate for some readers, both those who are and are not sighted.

Muffin, in Sharon Bell Mathis' Listen for the Fig Tree (1974) demonstrates for readers how a young teen with a visual impairment accomplishes tasks of daily life. For example, Muffin cooks a Christmas dinner, using a familiar routine and her hearing to accommodate for her inability to see:

> Muffin opened a cupboard and took out the timers she wanted. ...
>
> And minutes later, Muffin was dumping two packages of special stew spices into an earthen bowl half-filled with beef chunks. Then she put flour and more spices into a paper lunch bag and put in the pieces of meat and shook the bag up and down. Then she plopped each floured cube into a huge iron pot of sizzling fat. When the meat was crusty-edged, tested by Muffin's forking each piece and touching her finger to it quickly, she poured water in the pot and put the heavy lid on and turned the fire low.
>
> (Mathis, 1974, 115)

Mathis also demonstrates, through the character of Muffin, who had a best girl friend, a boyfriend, and adults who treat her as if she is their own child, that being blind does not prevent an adolescent from being attracted---or attractive---to sighted teens and adults.

Toward Realistic Portrayal of Characters with Disabilities

With the exception of books that are intentionally religious in nature, young adult literature, in order to succeed among adolescent readers, must present information, topics, themes, and questions in ways that are not didactic, condescending or pedantic. In addition, YAL that features characters with disabilities, in order to be realistic, must meet several criteria. Heim (1994) established five criteria on which to evaluate books that depict mentally disabled

characters. We suggest that these criteria are also relevant in evaluating books in which characters with visual impairments are portrayed.

First, accurate information must be used within the book, including the use of current terminology to describe the disability. Umerlik (1992) also stresses the importance of accuracy. Examples of how a novelist is able to include accurate, factual information, and also provide a glimpse of the attitude toward labels that a person with a visual impairment might experience, occurs in Light a Single Candle (Butler, 1970), when Cathy's father introduces her to talking book machines and talking books. This service is available to people with print disabilities through The National Library Services for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, which is part of the Library of Congress:

> She fitted the record onto the table, set the needle on carefully, and, in a moment, a man's voice, distinct and pleasant, began speaking from the lid:
>
> "Around the World in Eighty Days. By Jules Verne....Recorded for the Library of Congress in the talking books studio of American Foundation for the Blind, Incorporated, solely for the use of the blind." ...
>
> Cathy winced inwardly at the insensitive was in which people tossed around that ugly word *blind*. It jarred her nerves like chewing on sand each time she heard it, and she wished it might be struck from the language or forbidden by law.
>
> But the voice was going on,...in vigorous, cultivated tones that captured her interest...she loved being read aloud to, anyway...(pp. 43-44).

In the well-crafted novel, Tangerine, Bloor (1997) pushes the limits of believability when he portrays Paul, who has low vision, as having the ability to identify two single individuals who were seated among others in a crowded gymnasium: "I caught sight of Kerri and Cara. They

were in the top row, about five sections to the right of us, near the east entrance. They were looking right at me. They smiled and waved, and I waved back" (248).

Heim's second criterion is that the book should avoid stereotypes of the disabled; it should provide insight into the life of the person with disabilities. Passages like the one quoted above, in which Cathy is uncomfortable with the word "blind," help sighted readers consider the perspective of the person who has a visual impairment. In Tangerine, Paul is a good soccer player who explores a new neighborhood by riding his bicycle around it. He defies the stereotype that leads some to expect teens with visual impairments to be inactive and unwilling to go out on their own.

The third criterion, according to Heim, is that like any other literary work, a book in which the character is disabled should be well written. This thought is echoed by Mellon, who states, "a work of fiction revolving around a disabled character must be judged on its literary merits just like any other work of fiction." (1989, p. 144). Taylor (19), in the opening sentence of The Cay, set during the early part of World War II, provides an example of artistic use of figurative language: "Like silent, hungry sharks that swim in the darkness of the sea, the German submarines arrived in the middle of the night" (9). More recent examples of novels that provide high literary quality while portraying characters with visual impairment include Jeanette Ingold's in The Window (1996), which earned an ALA Best Book for Young Adults distinction, and Edward Bloor's Tangerine(1997), which was named an ALA Top Ten Best Books for Young Adults.

Fourth, Heim suggests, the book should confront the disability in a realistic manner, not over-emphasizing the disability but providing evidence that the character faces challenges because of the disability. Similarly, Mellon (1989) cautions that the author must be careful not

to romanticize the disability. Although the story of a young girl who is left to try to land a plane, after the pilot becomes unconscious, would be interesting to adolescent readers, the fact that Debbie is blind, in Milton's Blind Flight (1980), adds an extra element of interest. However, blindness in this book is not realistically portrayed, leaving readers with erroneous impressions of what it is like to be a newly blinded individual.

In Taylor's The Cay, young Phillip Enright is suddenly blinded when struck on the head during a shipwreck. He is rescued by Timothy, and together they find themselves living alone on the cay. The intrigue of the story is enhanced when young adolescent readers imagine themselves in Phillip's situation, trying to survive, unsure of rescue, with the help of only one wise and experienced islander. Unlike Blind Flight, however, there are significant themes in The Cay, such as questions about racial prejudice and the power of self-sacrificial love, that transcend the issue of the character's blindness, and thus bring a depth to Taylor's novel which Milton's book lacks.

In Tangerine, Paul is bothered not only by his impairment, but by the stigma that is attached to it. He explains, "I've always felt like a minority because of my eyes" (Bloor, 99). Although it is encouraging to see a character with low vision in a high quality YA novel, readers may be left to question some aspects of Bloor's depiction of Paul and Paul's impairment. For example, we might wonder if, realistically, Paul would be a successful goalie who is able to earn a place on three competitive middle school soccer teams, if his vision were significantly impaired.

Last, according to Heim, the book should avoid simply using a character who is disabled to promote the growth of a non-disabled character in the book. Rather, the character with the disability should experience growth himself or herself. For example, Muffin, in Listen for the

Fig Tree, demonstrates growth when she realizes that she cannot take responsibility for the unwise and self-destructive decisions her mother makes. Like other adolescents, she also has to reconcile the tug toward dependence on her mother, and independence. Because she is blind, readers might expect Muffin to give in to the urge to rely heavily on her mother and the other adults who care about her; however, she never indicates that she expects less of herself than she expects of others. For example when her mother is sick after of night of drinking, Muffin takes responsibility for cleaning and caring for her:

> She would have to wash all of the floors except the kitchen --- and maybe even the kitchen. She hadn't gone in there yet. She did then. Her mother had gotten sick there too, on much of the sink.
>
> ...
>
> The second thing she had to do was clean her mother up. But Muffin washed her won face first and tried to feel better.
>
> Vomit was vomit. It wasn't blood. (Mathis, 92-92)

The Void in YAL with Characters who are Visually Impaired

In preparing to write this article we read 13 books which had main characters with visual impairments (please see the Annotated Bibliography at the end of the article). Unfortunately, the fact that a book includes a character who has visual impairment offers no guarantee that the book provides accurate and reliable information on what it is like to live with a visual impairment. When ones compares a fictitious adolescent who has a visual impairment with an actual contemporary teenager who has a similar impairment, it is no surprise to discover that few books contain realistic characters with whom adolescents can identify. The characters in all of the

books except Muffin, in Listen for the Fig Tree, and Cathy, in Light a Single Candle and its sequel, Gift of Gold, who are congenitally low vision before they lose their vision completely as adolescents, are adventitiously visually impaired. In reality, the majority of teenagers with visual impairments are born this way. None of the books on our list has a character who was born blind. Few have characters who are important to the story until the point at which they become blind so that the focus is on the disability, not the character, once the disability is presented. Many of the characters, such as Phillip, in The Cay, have their sight restored at the end of the book. For Phillip, the restoration is explained in five sentences on the final page of the book:

> Four months later [after being rescued from the cay], I had the first of three operations. The piece of timber that had hit me the night the *Hato* went down had damaged some nerves. But after the third operation, I could see again. I would always have to wear glasses, but I could see. That was the important thing (136).

This "back to normal" theme may communicate to adolescents with visual impairments that a story only can have a happy ending when the blindness is removed. It may also give adolescents and their peers a false hope that blindness or low vision can be cured.

Another type of mismatch between fiction and reality is found in a pair of books by Beverly Butler. In Light a Single Candle and Gift of Gold, 14-year-old Cathy gradually loses her vision, yet gains freedom by obtaining a dog guide. Irritated by the attitude of a teacher at the school for the blind, Cathy, who is transferring back to public school, declares, " 'I'm going to get a guide dog." (127). Butler does note, through the voice of the narrator, that of the several training schools across the country, "Many did not like to take students younger than eighteen, but there were a few willing to make exceptions in the case of young people who were attending

public schools and could show a real need for a dog" (129). Cathy, fortunately, seemed to have no problem being approved as one of the exceptions who was allowed to have a dog. Actually, though, it is rare for anyone under the age of 18 to get a dog guide, and only approximately 2%-5% of adults with visual impairments get dog guides (Hill, 1986). In addition to this slightly misleading presentation regarding adolescents and dog guides, these books, and others, such as Taking Hold: My Journey into Blindness, in which a young woman receives a dog guide and realizes immediate advances in her independence, may convey to the reader that independence for individuals who are blind is obtainable only if the person has a dog guide. Adolescent readers may also be misled into believing that the dog guide may be able to take the blind individual to any location. Though dog guides often become familiar with routes, they still depend on the user to issue commands regarding where they must go. For example in Butler's *Light a Single Candle*, Cathy has brought her dog guide, Trudy, to school for the first time:

> A barely perceptible tremor of the leash told that she [Trudy] was glancing from side to side now and again, missing nothing of her new surroundings, but she trotted along at her usual brisk pace and mounted the stairs to the second floor as if she had been doing it for years. Then, a quarter of the way down the hall, she suddenly slowed, hesitating as if she expected a fresh command of some sort.
>
> 'Trudy,' Cathy asked, surprised, 'what's the trouble?'
>
> 'She's wondering if you want to go in here. This is 205. How about that!' Although Steve was speaking low...his amazement was plain.
>
> (Butler, 1970, 174-175)

Recommendations for Teachers, Families, Adolescents:

Finding Books that Present Realistic Characters with Visual Impairments

When we bring young adult literature into middle and high school classrooms, students with visual impairment and their sighted peers benefit from books that present characters whose visual disabilities are portrayed in realistic and positive ways. Most of the books that we have read present characters who are adventitiously blind, and whose blindness is finally cured. Yet in reality, adolescents who are blind or who have visual impairment are usually born with the impairment and do not have their sight restored. Therefore, we suggest the following checklist of questions that teachers and others can ask when evaluating a young adult book in which a character with a visual impairment is portrayed. Although not every book will meet each of the criteria, teachers, parents, media specialists, and others who make curricular decisions can use the checklist as a guide to ensure variety when selecting texts:

1. Does the book have characters who are congenitally visually impaired, both characters with low vision and characters who are blind? If it does not, readers may erroneously believe that all of those who have impairments have acquired them after having sight, at least for some time.
2. Does the book have a character with low vision? If not, student readers may mistakenly believe that all people with visual impairments are functionally blind.
3. Does the book have characters who attend public school and have contemporary teen age experiences, such as dating and sexual pressure, family problems, drugs and alcohol, violence, poverty, and so on? Since 90% of children and adolescents with visual impairment are in public schools (Corn, Bina, & DePriest, 1995), it is important for these characters to have experiences that typical adolescents face.

4. Does the book have characters who are facing issues specific to teenagers with visual impairment in the 21st century, such as learning to be non-drivers in a society where driving symbolizes independence and entrance into adulthood? There is a need for adolescents with visual impairment to have realistic role models with whom they can identify, even in literature.
5. Does the resolution involve a cure for the visual impairment, with the implication that in order

   to be normal, happy, and independent, one must be sighted? If it does, the book may lead a student reader to develop the belief that one cannot be normal unless a visual impairment is cured.
6. Do the families and peers of the character with visual impairment act realistically toward that character? Occasional fear, anger, and questioning are normal not only for the character who has a disability, but for the others in that character's life.
7. Do the families and teachers expect the character with visual impairment expect the character to be a successful independent person? 70% of people with visual impairments are unemployed. Student readers need to meet characters with visual impairment who are successful and independent as adolescents, thus implying that the characters will become successful adults.

In the table below the checklist outlined above is used to examine the book The Unfrightened Dark in which 14-year-old Jocelyn and her friends solve the mystery of a disappearing classmate

and animals, and Tangerine, in which 7th grader Paul learns how to cope with a new community, a troubling secret about his brother, and his own visual impairment. Each criteria is evaluated using a 3 point scale with "1" indicating poor representation, "2" indicating adequate representation, and "3" indicating excellent representation.

Criteria	Depiction in The Unfrightened Dark	Depiction in Tangerine
Characters with low vision and blindness / characters with congenital and adventitious vision losses	Jocelyn is blind and acquired her blindness through an accident at age 10. She was fully sighted until the accident. (1)	Paul was born sighted and as a preschooler had an accident that resulted in low vision. (2)
Character with low vision	Jocelyn is totally blind (1)	Paul has low vision, though at times he appears to have more usable vision than a teen with low vision would have. (2)
Attendance at public school and experiences of contemporary teens	Jocelyn attends public school. She is involved in feeding homeless people. Jocelyn and her aunt have a stressful relationship at times. (3)	Paul attends public school and mid-year chooses to transfer junior highs. Paul is aware of the different social groups in his school. Paul participates on a school soccer team. When there is an emergency at his school he quickly joins peers in helping. (3)
Issues specific to adolescents with visual impairments	Jocelyn experiences frustration at not being able to see a man who follows her and anger at her aunt who questions her ability to do things such as feeding the	Paul is angry and resentful of his parents at times when his visual impairment is pointed out to others. He is unhappy when he has to be shown

	homeless. Jocelyn at age 14 has a dog guide which is unrealistic. (2)	around the school by a peer because he receives special education services. (2)
Visual impairment as one important, but not central, aspect of the book itself	Jocelyn's blindness is a central part of the story; however, the resolution to the story is not dependent on Jocelyn regaining her sight. (2)	Though Paul's visual impairment is discussed throughout the novel there are other issues of adolescence such as making friends, family relationships that are also significant in the development of Paul's character. (3)
Realistic behavior towards the character with a visual impairment	Jocelyn's aunt worries about her in a manner typical of many towards people who are blind. (2)	Though adults at school and his parents recognize that Paul has a visual impairment, the reader does not see Paul receive school instruction that is specific to his visual impairment. His peers do not seem aware or concerned about his limited vision. (1)
Expectations for success	Jocelyn's friends expect her to be independent and view her as successful. Her aunt does not view her as an independent person. The opinions of Jocelyn's teachers are not clear in this book. (2)	Though he is expected to be successful, the expectations others have for Paul are the same that they have for his sighted peer. (1)

As indicated above, The Unfrightened Dark and Tangerine received ratings of 1, 2 and 3 when examined by each of the seven criteria, thus indicating that both novels have a variety of

strengths yet some cause for concern. In making selections of literature to use in middle and senior high school classrooms or to recommend to adolescents with and without visual impairments, it is important to select several books that will balance each other out in the criteria above. Use of criteria such as these in evaluating books will ensure that a variety are selected which paint a broad picture of the types of visual impairment individuals have and their experiences as a person with visual impairment.

Conclusion

It is not uncommon for people to never meet a person who is blind or who has low vision. Thus, adolescents only exposure to visual impairment may be through literature. Therefore, it is imperative that the characters they meet as they read are realistic. For the small group of adolescents who do have a visual impairment, realism is equally as important because the characters in the books they read influence how they view themselves as young men and women with visual impairment. We have outlined two sets of criteria which can be used in evaluating literary works in which characters with visual impairment are portrayed. These criteria are useful to all evaluating the realistic portrayal of individuals with visual impairment in literary works and in addition would be of value to authors of young adult literature as they develop characters for their stories.

Annotated Bibliography of Selected Young Adult Books

with Characters Who Have Visual Impairment

Alexander, Sally Hobart. Taking Hold: My Journey into Blindness. New York: Macmillan, 1994.

This is the beginning of the author's first person story of the changes that occurred when, at age 24, she began losing her sight to a disease. The readability of the text is low, yet the story is engaging; it is likely to hold adolescent readers' interest with details about how friends and family reacted to Sally's loss of sight, how she learned to read Braille and use sound as a guide, what happened to her romance, and other facts of the young woman's changed life.

ISBN: 0-02-700402-3. 168 pages.

Alexander, Sally Hobart. On My Own: The Journey Continues. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1997.

This sequel to Taking Hold: My Journey into Blindness continues the author's description of her life as a blind woman. The focus in this book is on Sally's responses to the loss of the last remains of her poor sight, and the adjustments she made --- including a teaching career then graduate school, and several romantic relationships the a happy marriage--- in order to life a full life. Like the book it follows, this one presents Sally as a person who becomes angry and depressed about her condition, at times, but who ultimately is able to transcend the negative emotions.

ISBN: 0-374-35641-6. 165 pages.

Bloor, Eward. Tangerine. New York: Apple Signature of Scholastic, 1997.

In this first novel by a former teacher of middle school students, Paul and his family have moved to the central Florida town of Tangerine. Paul has low vision, yet is a successful soccer player; he is given an opportunity to prove his athletic abilities when his mother agrees to hide information about his disability when he enrolls in a new junior high. Paul's older brother, Erik, is a football hero whose destructive and criminal behavior is slowly revealed throughout the book. The book will appeal to middle school students, especially, because they will recognize

the school scenes and the conflicts that Paul has to deal with as he grows up in a new and sometimes troubling community. They will also be intrigued by the sinister roles that Erik and Mother Nature play in the novel.

ISBN: 0-590-43277-x. 294 pages.

Butler, Beverly. Light a Single Candle. New York: Archway of Pocket Books, 1970.

This novel is about a teenager, Cathy, who loses her sight at age 14 to glaucoma. The author, who lost her sight as a teenager, too, does a fine job of showing readers the world of a low vision and blind adolescent. For Cathy, the reactions that her brother and friends have in regard to her condition are as significant --- and as tenuous --- as her own adjustment to life as a person without sight. In this novel, focuses on relationships and on school and home accommodations, including Cathy's use of a dog guide, Trudy, may help adolescent readers better understand how to be a friend to someone with low vision or blindness.

SBN: 671-29758-9. 217 pages.

Butler, Beverly. Gift of Gold. New York: Archway of Pocket Books, 1973.

In this sequel to Light a Single Candle, Butler continues the story of Cathy Wheeler, who became blind at age 14. In this novel, Cathy is college-aged and seeking a degree as a speech therapist. The struggles that she endures as a student, including learning to trust herself even when others, including, her professors, question her abilities, are balanced with the story of friendships and romances that are also important aspects of Cathy's life. Throughout the novel, her relationship with her dog guide, Trudy, is constant and positive.

SBN: 671-29742-2. 260 pages.

Dorris, Michael. Sees Behind Trees. New York: Hyperion, 1997.

This is the lyrical coming-of-age story of Walnut, a Powhatan Indian, who earns the adult name, Sees Behind Trees. Sees Behind Trees is too near-sighted to be a hunter, but his insights and instincts are valuable gifts; he must use the gifts on the epic journey he takes with Gray Fire, to find the land of water that the elderly man recalls from his youth. Young adolescents will be drawn to this almost magical adventure story, and most will find it easy to read; older readers will be likely to read it as a parable for growing up.

ISBN: 0-7868-0224-3. 104 pages.

Holland, Isabelle. The Unfrightened Dark. New York: Ballantine Fawcett Juniper, 1990.

Joycelyn, the protagonist in this novel, has been blind since she was 12. She has lived with her Aunt Marion, a strict and cold woman, since her parents were killed in an automobile accident. When pets start disappearing and a group of strangers in town are rude to Joycelyn, she begins to fear for the safety of her dog guide, Brace. When Brace is stolen, Joycelyn must solve a mystery and eventually discovers a cult in a nearby town. This novel has intrigue that goes far beyond Joycelyn's blindness, and is likely to appeal to adolescent readers who enjoy mysteries.

ISBN: 0-449-70383-5, 119 pages.

Ingold, Jeanette. The Window. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1996.

When her mother is killed in a car wreck, Mandy moves to Texas to live with members of her family whom she had never before known. In this ALA Best Book for Young Adults, Ingold skillfully blends attention to the issues related to Mandy's adjustment to her sudden blindness, with elements of adolescence that are common to most teens' experience--- problems with peer groups, family relationships, and growing toward maturity.

ISBN: 0-15-201264-8. 181 pages.

Mathis, Sharon Bell. Listen for the Fig Tree. New York: Viking, 1974.

Though dated in terms of the description of clothing and hairstyles that the characters wear, this novel has timeless appeal because of Mathis' sensitive portrayal of Muffin, a blind African American teen whose policeman father was killed and whose mother is reeling with depression and fear. In this novel, Muffin is the strongest character; she takes on adult roles with grace, yet is sometimes left to wrestle with questions about her life and her future. Mr. Dale, a trusted neighbor, helps her find her learn to trust herself and celebrate her African American heritage as she grows up.

SBN: 670-43016-1. 175 pages.

McElfresh, Lynn E. Can You Feel the Thunder? New York: AtheneumBooks for Young Readers, 1999.

The strength of this novel for young adolescents is in its portrayal of the relationship among siblings, when one is deaf and blind. Michael (Mic) Parsons is 13; his sister, Stephaine, is 15. Mic tells the first person story of how he befriends the neighborhood nerd, Vern Chortle, his struggles to play baseball, and how Stephanie teaches him to "see" beyond the surface of life. With low readability and potential for high interest, the novel will be a popular one among young middle school students who are resistant or unskilled readers.

ISBN: 0-689-82324-x. 138 pages.

Milton, Hilary. Blind Flight. New York: Franklin Watts, 1980.

In two days, 13-year-old Debbie will enter a hospital and have an operation that may restore her sight. Her Uncle Walt takes her on a ride in his plane; in a freak accident, a goose crashes into the windshield of the plane; Walt is knocked unconscious, and Debbie is left to fly the plane, alone. She is able to establish radio contact with someone who helps from the ground, but cannot land the small plane on the first try, and is re-routed to another landing strip where

foam will be applied to the ground to cushion her landing. Her younger brother, Rick, also talks to her, describing the placement of the plane's instruments in terms similar to the way he describes to her where the plates, salt and pepper shakers, and so on are arranged on the dinner table at home. Debbie successfully lands the plane and the unrealistic book ends with Debbie ready for her next challenge, the operation. This action-filled novel may entertain young readers, yet its action is improbable and its characters are 1-dimensional.

ISBN: 0-531-04108-5. 138 pages.

Stine, R. L. Into the Dark. New York: Archway of Pocket Books, 1997.

Paulette, the teenaged protagonist, has been blind since birth, and does not consider herself handicapped. Her good friends, like Jonathan, accept her as she is, at least until she becomes involved with Brad Jones. As Stine's mystery unravels, readers learn that Brad has an evil twin brother, one who has his eyes on Paulette, and whose activities she alone is able to uncover. This novel, one of the Fear Street books, will not be popular among teachers of English, but Stine's appeal among young adolescents is powerful. Those who are drawn to his brand of mystery might be introduced, in the book, to some aspects of living with blindness that they would otherwise consider.

ISBN: 0-671-52966-8. 147 pages.

Taylor, Theodore. The Cay. New York: Doubleday, 1987 (first published in 1969).

This is the story of how Timothy, an old West Indian sailor, saves the life of Phillip Enright, a child who is pushed overboard when the ship he is on is sunk by a German submarine during World War II. Phillip loses his vision when, during the torpedo attack, he is struck on the head. The wise old Timothy teaches him to survive without vision and without the material goods he has grown expect. Racial and social issues balance attention to interesting questions

about how a child would be able to get along on a deserted island if his sight were suddenly gone, in this novel by a popular YA author. The book has earned, among other honors, the ALA Notable Children's Book Award.

ISBN: 0-3850-7906-0. 144 pages.

References

Corn, A. L., Bina, M. J., & DePriest, L. B. (1995). The parent perspective on schools for students who are blind and visually impaired: A national study. Alexandria, VA: Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Corn, A. L. & Koenig, A. J. (1996). Perspectives on low vision. In A. L. Corn & A. J. Koenig (Eds.). Foundations of low vision: Clinical and functional perspectives (3-25). New York: American Foundation for the Blind Press.

Heim, A. B. (1994). Beyond the stereotypes: Characters with mental disabilities in children's books. School Library Journal 40(9), 139-142.

Hill, E. W. (1986). Orientation and mobility. In G. T. Scholl (Ed.). Foundations of Education for Blind and Visually Handicapped Children and Youth (pp. 315-340). New York: American Foundation for the Blind.

Hutto, M. D. & Hare, D. (1997). Career advancement for young women with visual impairments. Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness, 91(3), 280-295.

Mellon, C. A. (1989). Evaluating the portrayal of disabled characters in juvenile fiction. Journal of Youth Services in Libraries, 2(2), 143-150.

Peanstiehl, M. R. (1983). Role models for high-achieving visually impaired women. Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness, 77(6), 259-261.

Sacks, S. Z. (1996). Psychological and social implications of low vision. In A. L. Corn & A. J. Koenig (Eds.). Foundations of Low Vision: Clinical and Functional Perspectives (pp. 26-42). New York: AFB Press.

Umerlik, A. (1992). Fostering an understanding of the disabled through young adult literature. School Library Media Activities Monthly, 8(9), 35-36.